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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN EMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2200  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5668  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 926  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6848  
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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL BURMA EWSPAPER ON U.S. ENGAGEMENT THEME

Classified By Charge d'Affaires Larry Dinger for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

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11. (C) The regimenewspaper "The New Light of Myanmar" ran a July 1 op-ed suggesting that the Obama Administration's approach to Burma -- particularly its focus on Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and its continued endorsement of sanctions -- has been counter-productive. The op-ed prefers an alternate course, drawn from a recent article by Ella Gudwin in the Christian Science Monitor, emphasizing the usefulness of the USG engaging with the regime, including via humanitarian assistance intended to relieve suffering and contribute to "social development." We comment that, in the Burma political environment, the op-ed's endorsement of engagement and USG assistance aimed at social-development is worth noting. End summary.

Critique of Obama Administration Approach toward Burma

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12. (U) A July 31 op-ed in The New Light of Myanmar (NLOM), the Burma regime's media mouthpiece, is titled "Two different American views about Myanmar." The author notes Secretary Clinton's remarks in Phuket seeking positive changes in the military government, in particular to release ASSK, which would permit the USG to strengthen bilateral relations, including by resuming permission for U.S. investment. The op-ed notes, however, that President Obama on July 25 endorsed a law "to extend the provision to embargo all the goods from Myanmar. It is disappointing that President Obama said that he always welcomes those with clenched fists to shake hands with them, but did sign the extension of the sanctions designed to deepen the abject misery being faced by Myanmar people."

Encouragement of USG Engagement, HA for Social Development

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13. (U) The op-ed then turns to an article by Ella Gudwin, a director at AmeriCares and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, in the July 22 Christian Science Monitor. The NLOM op-ed sketches, selectively, Ms. Gudwin's arguments (we are e-mailing the full op-ed text to EAP/MLS), and concludes it is an opportune time for the USG to adopt a new policy

since Cyclone Nargis illustrated that collaborative work with the regime can be productive. The op-ed notes three of Ms. Gudwin's prescriptions for a new USG approach: "to encourage U.S. humanitarian organizations to provide aid for rehabilitation and social development in Myanmar; to build trust with medium-ranking officials in favor of reforms through discussions; and to lay down appropriate programs in cooperation with the countries interested in Myanmar's future" such as the PRC, India, and the ASEANs. The op-ed concludes: "a drop of honey could attract more flies than a gallon of a certain liquid...."

Comment

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14. (C) In the skewed political environment of Burma, this op-ed strikes us as a tentative olive branch, publicly indicating a regime willingness to engage to a certain extent with the USG if Washington would only stop fixating on the ASSK issue and would please resist renewing sanctions policies. The seeming endorsement of USG humanitarian assistance for "rehabilitation and social development" is worth noting. Embassy Rangoon sees USG humanitarian assistance to the people of Burma via the NGO community as a very important tool for building capacities that can, over time, contribute to a more democratic future here.  
DINGER